

Los Angeles County
Museum of Art

Seventeenth-
Century Italian,
French, and
Spanish Art

Gallery Guide

Because the works of art shown
in the galleries are sometimes
changed, certain works discussed
here may not be on view at the
present time.

Much seventeenth-century art was created to serve the Catholic Church and the Counter-Reformation, a movement that sought to stem the rise of Protestantism in Europe and reaffirm the strength of Catholicism. The center of activity was the papal seat in Rome, and Italian art was thus particularly influenced by the dictates of the Church. Artists from other largely Catholic countries, such as France and Spain, also played their part in the glorification of the faith by creating art that expressed religious sentiments in a dramatic and emotionally charged style.

The influence of the Catholic Church was not the only factor in the formation of the Baroque, the artistic style predominant in the seventeenth century. The artists of this period saw themselves as heirs of the Renaissance masters and wished to reassert the clarity and simplicity of the previous century. They reacted against what was perceived as the affectation of sixteenth-century Mannerism, which they felt had subverted the classical purity of High Renaissance art.

The return to harmonious forms and compositions began at the end of the sixteenth century with the Carracci family, who opened an academy in Bologna in 1582 founded on the concept that the practice of art could be learned by life drawing, study of anatomy, and emulation of the art of antiquity and the Renaissance. Their teachings were extremely influential for many artists of the Baroque period, among them Guido Reni and Domenichino.

Another important stylistic factor that defined Baroque art throughout Italy, France, Spain, Flanders, and even Protestant Holland is found in the art of the Italian painter Caravaggio (1571–1610). Although the extreme naturalism of his art was deemed indecorous and even offensively ugly by contemporary critics, his dramatic contrasts of light and dark (called *tenebrism*, after *tenebroso*, meaning “dark”) had a great effect on many artists, including Rembrandt van Rijn, Jusepe de Ribera, Georges de La Tour, and Tazio da Varallo.



Domenichino

Italy, 1581–1641

Saint Ignatius of Loyola's Vision of Christ and God the Father at La Storta

c. 1622

Oil on canvas

65 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 38 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (166.1 x 98.1 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.89.59

Domenichino, born Domenico Zampieri, began his artistic training as a youth in the studio of Denys Calvaert, a Flemish artist living in Bologna. Before long he joined the more progressive academy of the Carracci, where he became schooled in the forms of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. Domenichino joined Annibale Carracci in Rome in 1602 as one of the team of decorators working with the master on the frescoes for a gallery in the Palazzo Farnese. After this, Domenichino began to receive his own commissions in Rome, as well as in Bologna, Fano, and Naples.

The museum's altarpiece was commissioned in 1622 or soon thereafter by Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, most likely in conjunction with the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola in March of that year. The painting depicts Ignatius's vision as he knelt in prayer at a wayside chapel at La Storta, on the road from Siena to Rome. The year was 1537, and he was on his way with two companions (seen in the back-

ground) to seek papal recognition of his newly founded Society of Jesus (the Jesuit Order). In the vision God entrusts the protection of the Society to Christ, who points to the cross, indicating that he will support Ignatius's mission in Rome. Through clarity of form, vibrant colors, and naturalistic detail Domenichino eloquently presents to us the emotion experienced by Ignatius in his encounter with the divine.



Guido Reni

Italy, 1575–1642

Portrait of Cardinal Roberto Ubaldino

c. 1625

Oil on canvas

77 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 58 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (196.9 x 149.2 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.83.109

Guido Reni also studied with the Mannerist artist Calvaert and, like Domenichino, transferred to the academy of the Carracci in the mid-1590s. Reni was the premier artist of his day and received an endless stream of commissions from both ecclesiastical and secular patrons. He sought always to idealize his subjects and was not interested in depicting life's gritty realities in the manner of Caravaggio. Reni was a firm believer in the idea that divine grace could be expressed through art.

In his *Portrait of Cardinal Roberto Ubaldino* Reni achieves a fine balance between idealization and individuality of the sitter. The cardinal is presented almost as an

icon, in the traditional pose for papal and royal portraits established in the sixteenth century by Reni's most admired predecessors, Raphael and Titian. At the same time, through masterful handling of paint, Reni creates a forceful and individual presence: the resolute mouth, deep-set eyes, and tensed facial muscles indicate a man of character. Reni depicts with marvelous skill a variety of sumptuous textures — silk, lace, and velvet. The garden beyond the arcade opens the picture space, suggesting the greater world beyond the cardinal's chamber. Cardinal Ubaldino was the grand-nephew of Pope Leo xi de' Medici, and was cardinal legate in Bologna from 1623 to 1627. He most likely commissioned this portrait of himself for the papal Jubilee of 1625.



Guido Reni

Italy, 1575–1642

Bacchus and Ariadne

c. 1619–20

Oil on canvas

38 x 34 in. (96.5 x 86.4 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.79.63

Mythological and religious subjects afforded Reni many possibilities for the idealization of the human form. In *Bacchus and Ariadne* Reni depicts the god Bacchus coming to the aid of the beautiful Ariadne, who had been abandoned by her lover Theseus on the island of Naxos. The white sails of Theseus's ships can be seen faintly on the

horizon. Above Ariadne's head a circle of stars alludes to the legend that after her death Bacchus took her nuptial crown to heaven and created from it the constellation Corona Borealis.

The painting may have been commissioned by Reni's friend, the poet Cesare Rinaldi, who was associated with a cultivated circle of intellectuals and literati. It is possible that this painting may represent a *scherzo* (jest), a literary form in which the attitudes of the figures are inappropriate to their circumstances. Whether or not any humor was intended, Reni's consummate skill as a painter of the human form and his knowledge of antique sculpture is revealed. Gracefully posed, the two nudes are sensuously rounded and well-proportioned, perfect models of classical harmony and balance. Using rich, saturated color, particularly the blue backdrop of sea and sky, Reni creates an idealized setting for these elegant beings.



Tanzio da Varallo

Italy, c. 1575/80–1635

Adoration of the Shepherds with Saints Francis and Carlo Borromeo

c. 1628–30

Oil on canvas

73 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 59 in. (185.7 x 149.9 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.81.247

Tanzio da Varallo was born Antonio d'Enrico in the small northern Italian village of Alagna in 1575. His early artistic training is unrecorded, but he traveled south to Rome with his brother in 1600, the two young men seeking work as artists. It was in Rome that Tanzio first experienced the *tenebroso* painting of Caravaggio, an encounter that proved to be significant for Tanzio's development.

Adoration of the Shepherds with Saints Francis and Carlo Borromeo is from Tanzio's mid-career and shows how he interpreted Caravaggio's realistic style for his own purposes. Like Caravaggio, Tanzio makes use of strong contrasts of lights and darks and does not beautify the weathered, care-worn faces of the saints. There is adoration mixed with sorrow on Mary's face and on the face of the shepherd, who, touching his hand to his heart, receives Christ's blessing. In a gesture of infinite tenderness, Saint Francis extends a finger to touch the child's toes. One source for Tanzio's robust, lifelike figures might have been the life-sized, painted terra-cotta statues in the chapels of the shrine of the Sacro Monte di Varallo, where he painted frescoes for more than a decade, beginning in 1616. The enlargement of the shrine in the sixteenth century had been a particular concern of Carlo Borromeo, the saintly cardinal-archbishop of Milan, depicted here. Tanzio arranges his figures, immovable and timeless, in a shallow space that locates them outside everyday reality. Even today's viewer can sense the piety that the painting was intended to evoke three centuries ago.



Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione

Italy, 1609–1663/65

Noah's Sacrifice after the Deluge

1650–55

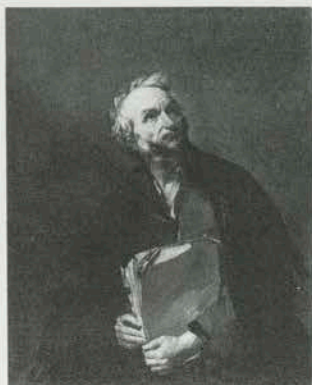
Oil on canvas

55¼ x 76¼ in. (140.3 x 193.7 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.84.18

Castiglione was born in the north Italian port city of Genoa, an artistic center with a flourishing native school of painting that emphasized naturalism. His early years were influenced by several Flemish artists who worked in or paid extended visits to Genoa, including Jan Roos, Peter Paul Rubens, and Anthony van Dyck. Castiglione was a highly skilled draftsman as well as a painter; he made significant innovations in the art of etching and was a great admirer of Rembrandt's work in this medium.

Castiglione's proclivity toward still life, related undoubtedly to his love of Dutch and Flemish art, is apparent in *Noah's Sacrifice after the Deluge*. In many of his paintings the details of a still life are often given more importance than the primary subject. In this case the focus of the picture is on the animals and objects that have been saved in Noah's ark from the great flood. Arranged by Castiglione in a marvelous profusion of textures and details are a cow, a donkey laden with pots and pans, a sheep, a goat, a turkey, two dogs, two cats, two guinea pigs, two rabbits, and a variety of utensils. At the right is a man holding a pot, and beyond him are several victims of the flood. The nominal subject, Noah and his sons offering a sacrifice to God in thanks for their salvation, is removed to the middle distance.



Jusepe de Ribera

Spain, 1588–1652

A Philosopher

1637

Oil on canvas

49 x 39 in. (124.3 x 99.1 cm)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. R. Stanton Avery,
M.91.125.2

Jusepe de Ribera was born in Jativa, on the east coast of Spain near Valencia, a region that had well-established ties to Italy and Italian art. He went to Italy at an unknown date and settled for a time in Rome, where he became known as *lo Spagnoletto* (the little Spaniard). In his early work he was affected by the realism of Caravaggio as well as the classicism of the Carracci family, all of whom were active in Rome at the turn of the seventeenth century. In about 1616 Ribera went to Naples, then a territory of Spain, where he spent the rest of his career enjoying the patronage of the Spanish viceroys.

This work belongs to a group of six paintings of ancient philosophers executed by Ribera as a commission for the prince of Liechtenstein in 1636–37 (the other paintings are in museums in Hartford and Indianapolis and in private collections in Europe). From an inventory compiled in 1767 we know that the six pictures depicted Aristotle, Plato, Crates, Anaxagoras, Diogenes, and Protagoras, but scholars still debate the identity of each image. It is thought that this philosopher, dramatically isolated against a dark background and gazing upward into the light, might be the idealist Plato. The

face and hands of the figure are painted in an impasto, a thick application of paint often employed by Ribera to great effect, giving his canvases a rough, vibrant surface.



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

Spain, 1617–1682

The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine

1680–82

Oil on canvas

28 x 20½ in. (71.1 x 52.1 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.83.168

Murillo was born in Seville and was trained there by Juan del Castillo, a relative on his mother's side. In his twenties the young artist was introduced through prints and copies to the works of the Flemish painter Anthony van Dyck, which had a profound effect on his work. He became the leading painter in Seville during the second half of the seventeenth century and cofounded an academy of arts in that city in 1660.

This is a *modello* (a preparatory oil sketch) done in preparation for Murillo's work on a large polyptych for the abbey church of the Capuchins in Cadiz. *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* depicts a vision of the fourth-century saint Catherine of Alexandria, in which the Christ Child places a ring on her finger as a symbol of her spiritual

betrothal to God. A fragment of the wheel that was used to torture her for her beliefs and the sword that ultimately martyred her are depicted in the foreground. In the sketch Murillo concentrates his attention on the central figures, leaving the surrounding angels in a frothy haze of delicately applied paint. The pastel colors and the visible sweetness in the faces of Mary and Saint Catherine are typical of Murillo's work.

Murillo died while working on the altarpiece, and it was presumably completed by his assistant Francisco Meneses Osorio, who would have used this *modello* as a guide.



Antoine Le Nain

France, 1600/10–1648

Three Young Musicians

c. 1630

Oil on panel

10¾ x 13½ in. (27.3 x 34.3 cm)

Anonymous gift, M.58.25

Antoine Le Nain was the eldest of three brothers from Laon, all of whom were painters. Until recently there was disagreement over the attribution of their paintings, since they did not use their first names in signing their works. Based on stylistic differences that became apparent when many of their paintings were brought together in a Paris exhibition of 1978, it became possible to separate the work into three distinct groups. Paintings that depict people gathered around a table or listening to music have been attributed to Antoine.

In the museum's painting three boys sit at a table. The youngest, on the right, holds sheet music and

seems to be singing, a slightly older child in the center plays a rebec, and the oldest strums a guitar. The artist did not attempt to penetrate beneath the surface to reveal the psychology of his characters but rather excelled as a master of detail. Careful brushstrokes describe the smallest of details; lips, eyebrows, and locks of hair are all rendered with a consummate delicacy and precision.



Georges de La Tour

France, 1593–1652

Magdalen with the Smoking Flame

c. 1638–40

Oil on canvas

46⅞ x 36⅞ in. (117 x 91.8 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.77.73

The early artistic training of Georges de La Tour is unclear, but he was in Lunéville in Lorraine in 1620 and became the town's master painter. Whether or not La Tour ever saw Caravaggio's work in Rome is debatable; it is more likely that he encountered the master's tenebrism in the work of Caravaggio's followers in the Low Countries. La Tour was tremendously successful during his lifetime but his work fell into obscurity after his death. Only in the early twentieth century did scholars rediscover this great master.

The *Magdalen with the Smoking Flame*, from La Tour's mature period, depicts the penitent Mary Magdalen not as an old woman in her grotto, as was the tradition, but as a young girl of the provinces. She is surrounded by the

objects of a contemplative life: a skull, books of Holy Scripture, and a scourge. The focus of the picture is clearly the candle and the glowing light it casts on the figure. La Tour was a master of the depiction of candlelight and its effects. He equates this physical light with the spiritual light by which the Magdalen was converted from a life of material pleasures to one of spiritual pursuits. Compare this depiction to Simon Vouet's painting of 1627, *Virginia da Vezzo, the Artist's Wife, as the Magdalen*, also in this gallery, a sensuous and worldly depiction of the Magdalen that is unusual in seventeenth-century art.



Philippe de Champaigne

France, 1602–1674

Saint Augustine

c. 1645–50

Oil on canvas

31 x 24½ in. (78.7 x 62.2 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.88.177

Philippe de Champaigne began his artistic training in his birthplace, Brussels, under the tutelage of landscape painter Jacques Fouquieres. Champaigne went to Paris in 1621 and became a French citizen in 1629. He worked on decorations at the Palais du Luxembourg, a royal residence, and went on to make his reputation as a painter of portraits and religious subjects. He was the favorite artist of King Louis XIII and of Cardinal Richelieu, whose portrait he painted on several occasions.

Champaigne worked in a highly detailed manner, as demonstrated by his depiction of Saint Augustine (354–430), a great theologian and philosopher. The artist depicts the saint in sixteenth-century Spanish bishop's robes of a type that would have been common in the Spanish-ruled Low Countries, Champaigne's native area. The cope, or outer garment, is richly embroidered with figures of the evangelists and other saints, and has a clasp, or morse, depicting the head of Christ.

Early in his life Augustine had embraced a heresy known as Manichaeism, which he later rejected. Here the saint, revered as one of the four Fathers or Doctors of the Latin (western) Church, is seen receiving divine inspiration as he tramples the writings of three theologians with whom he had disputed Church doctrine: Celestius, Pelagius, and Julian of Eclanum. Augustine is illuminated by the light of truth and clasps a flaming heart, a symbol of his spiritual fervor.



Antoine Coypel

France, 1661–1722

The Baptism of Christ

c. 1690

Oil on canvas

53⅞ x 38⅞ in. (136.2 x 97.6 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.90.154

Antoine Coytel was born in Paris, the son of the painter Noël Coytel. At an early age he entered the French Academy in Rome, of which his father was the director. He won many academic honors during the late seventeenth century and eventually became First Painter to King Louis XIV in 1716. Coytel synthesized the draftsmanship that can be traced from Raphael to the French classical painter Nicolas Poussin with the illusionistic devices of the Roman Baroque and the rich colorism of the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens.

Coytel's *Baptism of Christ* is an autograph replica of the altarpiece in the church of Saint-Riquier in Picardy. Long before the convenience of photographic duplication, it was common practice for an artist to paint a another, smaller version of an important commission and keep it in the studio. Such pictures were not preparatory studies but finished works that corresponded, except for size, to the original. Coytel's style, with its light, vivid colors, and tumultuous arrangements of gorgeous figures, forms a bridge between Baroque painting and the aristocratic elegance of the Rococo style — characterized by pastel colors, graceful lines, and playful, seductive subject matter — that dominated the next generation of painters.



Pierre Le Gros II

France, active Italy, 1666–1719

Saint Thomas

c. 1703–5

Terra-cotta

27⅜ x 18½ x 10¾ in. (69.5 x 47 x 27.3 cm)

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Pierre Le Gros II was trained in sculpture by his father and in design by his uncle, the engraver Jean Le Pautre. In 1690 he was sent to Rome on a royal stipend to study at the French Academy and remained in Italy thereafter, gaining a reputation as the spiritual heir to the greatest Italian sculptor of the seventeenth century, Gianlorenzo Bernini. Le Gros produced many sculptures for the Jesuit Order, most notably a marble group for the chapel of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the church of Il Gesù in Rome.

The museum's *Saint Thomas* is a model for a fifteen-foot marble sculpture executed for the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome. In 1700 Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili and Pope Clement XI devised a plan to provide the basilica with over-life-sized marble statues of the twelve apostles for the nave of what was one of Christendom's oldest, largest, and most

venerated churches. Many donors and artists were involved in this ambitious undertaking, which was to be funded by international subscription. Le Gros was responsible for the figures of Saint Thomas and Saint Bartholomew. The apostle Thomas, a charismatic teacher, is said to have brought Christianity to Southeast India in the first century A.D. The terra-cotta *modello* exerts a dramatic presence through the saint's powerful gesture and the turbulent movement of his drapery. The pose of the gigantic marble statue was modified, possibly to fit better into its niche, to complement the figures of apostles by other artists, or to allow the use of a smaller and less costly block of marble.

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